

The Most Precious Gift

Local Mother Attributes Car Seat Use With Survival Of Her Infant Son After Car Crash At Dangerous Intersection Near Belcourt

Logan J. Davis
Times Reporter

BELCOURT — Two thousand years ago, the world was given a gift from God. A very special boy was born named Jesus. This Christmas, Anna Myers of Belcourt can relate somewhat to that and will need look no further than right next to her for the most precious gift in the world — her own infant son, Nathaniel. It's a gift she actually gave to herself by saving the 19-month-old's life. Not in any dramatic way, but just as importantly, in a loving and caring way. It was the moment that she properly secured Nathaniel in his car seat when they left a local grocery store.

October 26, 2000 started off as a typical and uneventful day for Anna and her young son. Breakfast, laughs and talking to

each other as any parent and child do when they are as close as these two Turtle Mountain Chippewa tribal members.

However, on the way back from a short trip for groceries, a dangerous intersection that has claimed the lives of tribal members in the past lay ahead. But the roads were in good condition and there was no thought of any mishap in Anna's mind, even though she and her boyfriend had been in an accident three years ago at the intersection when a vehicle ran the stop sign.

"Nathaniel was right in back of me talking to me as we came up to the intersection. It all happened so fast. Just in a matter of a second," Myers stated with a snap of her fingers. "All I remember is a purplish flash out of the corner of my eye and a terrible crash. The vehicle that hit us was a full-sized Blazer and the

impact was very hard. I got whiplash, hurt my lower back and left shoulder....but my baby got the worst end of it."

Nathaniel suffered numerous lacerations to his face, required 11 stitches and will need some minor plastic surgery to repair damage to his right eye.

"I had over a hundred dollars worth of groceries and none of that survived. I had some cans of vienna sausage and some cans of pop in the grocery bags and I figure one of those things might have hit him, too. But it was mostly glass that cut him because even now, he starts itching on his face and forehead and bits of glass will come out. There's still glass in there. But I know for a fact that his car seat saved his life and I wish some of the girls around here that don't buckle up their kids start before something happens. I get a fun-



Nathaniel Lindgren with a grateful mother, Anna Myers

ny feeling when I meet a car with some little heads bouncing around, standing up in the back seat. These girls have to start buckling up their kids,

"The lady that ran into me was driving her son to a local person's house to look at a car because he had totalled out his car the night before....and he was in the Blazer when it hit us. It

was his second major accident in just a short time. At the hospital, he was telling his parents that he was never going to drive again. It just goes to show you that accidents can happen suddenly, without warning to anyone at

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anytime. Look at me, I was almost home. People are telling me that I need to start taking a different route to Belcourt and stay away from that intersection by Fredericks. Nathaniel's father's uncle and cousin were both killed right there and there have been so many bad accidents there, it should tell the road department something."

According to Myers, there is a petition being circulated requesting that particular intersection be made into a four-way stop because of the fatalities and many accidents that occurred there.

Turtle Mountain Highway Safety Officer Sharon Parisien is thankful for the outcome of the situation and that Myers used the convertible car seat.

"I want to commend Anna Myers for what she did. She came in and thanked us for helping in saving her baby. The car seat was there in the car, but it was Anna who was the one who actually buckled the child up," noted Parisien. "We can provide the car seats, but the most important step is buckling up the child. She is the one who saved her own son's life. That car seat is manufactured to do the job of keeping children alive, but we want to commend Anna for the example she has shown to the community,

"One of the major focuses in writing grants for our program is that we want our children to be buckled up. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is focusing more on injury and death prevention for child passengers. The laws are in the books and we have a tribal ordinance that prevents children from being unrestrained in a moving vehicle. It's 50 dollars per child for each violation. So if you have four children in the vehicle unrestrained, that's two hundred dollars," said Parisien.

The Tribal Highway Safety Program provides car seats for anyone regardless of income, both tribal and non-tribal members. There are two different types of programs. The loaner program is for any person that requests them with no income criteria. The other one is the purchase program that provides car seats to any TANF recipient. The state reimburses the tribal program for car seats purchased for each TANF client.

"We want the community to know that with the availability of car seats, there is no excuse for a child not to have one," emphasized Parisien. "Right now, we have plenty of grant money coming in for car seats. Ford Motor Company supplies grants and we applied for ten thousand dollars from Ford. Ford Motor Company won a lawsuit a while back and instead of putting it back into their company, Ford turned the money over to the

National Injury Prevention Center to post the grants. Only ten Native American Tribes applied for those grants nationwide, so we have been pretty much assured of getting the grant. In addition, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has given the program nine thousand dollars and we spent about four thousand of that so far. Additionally, IHS (Indian Health Service) has provided us with three thousand. There are a lot of things happening in highway safety in the nation. Awareness of how important it is to buckle up is key to injury prevention and death in traffic accidents. We love our children. So we need to use child restraints and car seats to show that love."

Parisien also emphasized that winter is the time when each and every adult must secure themselves and their young passengers in seat belts and car seats. Icy road conditions are a very dangerous condition and could lead to tragedy.

"People! Please, please... buckle yourselves and your kids up every time you get in your vehicle. Especially when the road is icy or snowpacked. Right now, it doesn't take much for a vehicle to start sliding. A collision can kill your kid or yourself, even at what seem to be slower speeds. We want everyone to be safe and alive all this holiday season," said Parisien.

It is nice to know that one fortunate local mother will enjoy this Christmas watching her adorable young son open his gifts from Santa. Thanks to the love she has for him and because of the now-mangled car seat that lies in the basement of the Tribal Highway Safety office. Never to be used again, but having served its very, very important service.



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Courtesy of
Sharon Parisian,
Turtle Mountain Highway
Safety Officer